THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(Section of the Library Association)
ACTING HON. EDITOR: FRANK M. GARDNER
(Luton Public Libraries)

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Announcements

REVISION SCHOOL

IT is hoped to arrange the One-day Revision School, mentioned by Mr. Halliday in the February number, to take place at Chaucer House on Sunday, 23rd April. It will begin at 11 a.m., continuing until about 7 p.m. with breaks for meals.

It will be open to students studying for the Elementary and Intermediate Examinations who are taking, or have taken, an A.A.L. Correspondence Course in the particular subject to be studied. Other students may attend on payment of *2s. 6d.*

A number of tutors from the London area will be present, and a full programme of lectures (Elementary, Intermediate Part I, and Intermediate Part II, to run concurrently) will be arranged. In addition, there will be ample opportunity for personal contact with tutors for discussion of individual difficulties.

Application forms, which must be returned before April 15th, and further particulars are obtainable from D. H. Halliday, Norbury Branch Library, London Road, S.W.16.

GREATER LONDON DIVISION

The following arrangements have been made for the joint meeting on April 12th next and the visit to the Ilford Photographic Works which precedes it, preliminary announcements of which were made in last month's ASSISTANT. Coaches leave Ilford Station for Brentwood at 2.30 p.m., and will return to the Gantshill Branch Library by 6 p.m. A non-stop train leaves Liverpool Street at 2 p.m., reaching Ilford at 2.14. There will be no charge to members of the respective associations for coach conveyance. The joint meeting will hear a paper by the Chairman of the Paddington Libraries Committee entitled " Old fields and new corn : the literature of the law." Intending visitors to Brentwood are asked to send their names to the Hon. Secretary, Central Library, Mare Street, E.8, as soon as possible.

The list of officers of the North-Eastern Division was incorrectly stated. The correct list is given herewith :

NORTH-EASTERN DIVISION.—*Chairman :* R. MURIS (Newcastle). *Vice-Chairman :* E. G. HATTON, F.L.A. (Tynemouth). *Honorary Trea-*

urer: Miss M. L. COATSWORTH (Sunderland). *Honorary Education Secre-ary:* E. F. PATTERSON, A.L.A. (King's College). *Honorary Secretary:* G. S. D. LINDSAY, A.L.A. (Tynemouth).

SCOTTISH LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

(In affiliation with The Library Association)

SUMMER SCHOOL

The fourth annual Summer School of Library Practice organized by the Scottish Library Association will be held at Newbattle Abbey College from 24th June to 1st July next. The principal aim of the School is to give assistance to those who are studying for the examinations of the Library Association, but the Syllabus has been designed so that the lectures will be of value to those who are not personally concerned with examinations or those who have already taken certificates and wish refresher courses.

Courses of lectures will be given by Messrs. A. Strain, Glasgow (Intermediate: cataloguing); W. B. Paton, Airdrie (Intermediate: classification); S. J. Marks, Dumfriesshire (Elementary: administration and classification); J. Forsyth, Dunfermline (Elementary: literary history and cataloguing); R. Butchart, Edinburgh (Library of Congress and subject classifications); and W. E. C. Cotton, Scottish Central Library for Students (Regional bureaux and co-operative cataloguing). The Inaugural Address will be given by Professor James Drever, of Edinburgh University.

The Prospectus will be available at an early date, but those interested are requested to communicate with the Hon. Secretary, Mr. A. G. MacKay, Midlothian County Library, 9 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh, 3, as soon as possible.

The Divisions

WEST MIDLANDS MEETING

FOLLOWING the annual meeting of the Midland Division of the A.A.L. Section, a meeting which took the form of a "magazine evening" was held at Acock's Green Branch Library, Birmingham, on Wednesday, 25th January, under the auspices of the Joint Committee of the Division and the Birmingham and District Branch of the Library Association. Under the "editorship" of Mr. M. G. Rathbone, the following contributions were duly "published": "Ancient libraries and the

modern assistant," by Miss E. D. Corbett; "Poets in celluloid," by Mr. L. E. Davies; "Library levities," a collection of funny stories, by Miss J. Beck; "Vogue," by Miss I. V. Butler; "Music and literature," by Mr. T. M. Doust; "Lancashire hot-pot," by Mr. R. Broadbent (assisted by Miss E. B. Hollier); "On having a favourite author," by Mr. K. A. L. Roberts; "A Poem on beetles," by Miss J. Garlick; "A. G. Macdonell," by Mr. G. H. Toney; "The Assassin," by Miss M. Willis; "A Brush with the moderns," by Mr. F. S. Stych; "Short story," by Miss E. A. Stratford; "Some observations on mass-observation," by Mr. J. P. Tonks; "Frost at noon: or the blasted nightingale," a 1939 centenary, by Mr. J. C. Sharp (assisted by Miss I. V. Butler and Mr. L. E. Davies).

Miss Butler's contribution, "Vogue," was voted by a large majority to be the best of the evening and earned for her a book token.

The Gentle Art of Losing Borrowers

R. L. W. COLLISON

MANY of the ideals which we hear at our professional meetings can only be realized by a complete change of attitude on the part of librarian, library committee, council, and ratepayer. Therefore many of us continue to preach one method and carry out another: much to the scorn of the occasional visiting colleague. Moreover, library services are bewildering in their variations, and as an illustration of this point, no better example could be taken than London, where good, indifferent, and inadequate services operate together within the space of a few miles. Unfortunately, it is not always the system which offers the highest salaries which gives the best service, nor may a poorly paid staff be a guarantee of enthusiasm. Thus, so much being beyond our reach, I have chosen a problem where, I believe, the remedy lies in the hands of every assistant and whose importance ultimately comprises our own future. To your own judgment I leave the task of deciding whether I am belabouring the obvious or underlining the unobserved.

Not so many years ago small increases in the number of borrowers were occasions for great rejoicing, and a slight drop in the number was disquieting. To-day, when the opening of a new library or an additional branch will add another 5,000 borrowers to our files, the large number of cancellations are recorded but appear to be unexamined. There is, too, a difference in attitude in the new type of library compared with that in the old. Although staffs

were inadequate thirty years ago, I do not believe a borrower could have entered any library at that time and have received the scant attention which the overwhelming majority of borrowers accept on a busy night in 1939. In those days the position of chief librarian was often one without its present-day dignity, and that of a senior assistant lacking in the opportunities of to-day, but this very fact made both available for more personal attention to the requirements of the public than is possible in our far more pleasant circumstances. I would ask those of you who have ever worked on a busy suburban counter to consider whether the necessarily matter-of-fact and slightly official air with which you cope with borrowers as though they are sheep would encourage you to continue to deal with any shop in which you might meet the same attitude. In this connexion, I would ask you what causes are to be attributed the large number of lapses of membership which occur in every library in every year and, moreover, what steps are taken in your own library to combat this.

It must always be borne in mind that the seceding of one borrower does not represent merely a unit of one in relation to the total population. This borrower may have a family or relations, he certainly has friends or business associates, and he may often be inclined to tell everyone (with the slight exaggeration necessary to make a good story) why he has shaken off our dust. Naturally, extreme cases such as this occur only occasionally, but they are occurring to a less extent all the time, and there is little we can do about it unless we submit the whole problem to an examination as exhaustive as Darwin gave to the habits of the earthworm.

I do not intend, within the limits of this evening, to attempt the exhaustive method, but I want to give enough examples to show that the matter will warrant detailed study. The first step is to compare our practice with that of business houses and shops: there are, I believe, few business men who would allow their customers to forsake their service with as few enquiries as we make concerning the cause of their dissatisfaction. A bank, for instance, must show its inspectors the reasons for loss of clients; a shop's very livelihood depends on its retaining every account which does not show an actual loss. Our own professional suppliers will follow up loss of custom with letters asking whether we have any complaints to be remedied, and while I am not going to suggest such an elaborate method of regaining ground, I would urge that our borrowers are—all of them—sufficiently valuable to us to merit our greater consideration of their satisfaction.

The Library Assistant

Without searching the byways of our technique I was able to jot down more than forty general ways in which we too often succeed in antagonizing the public, and although they are of greatly differing values they are all important and—remediable. They were, I found, attributable to three aspects of the public library system: the staff, the organization of the library, and, lastly, its rules and regulations. Many of the points overlap but none of them appears to be synonymous with any other.

The staff, as was quickly apparent, is an everlasting difficulty. Character is the chief bugbear: rudeness or indifference (no matter how tired the assistant) is an eternal menace—the occurrence of either may undo the work of many keen assistants. A superior attitude will undoubtedly antagonize the greater mass of middle-brow borrowers, no matter how much it may impress a handful of admiring extremists; an appearance of ignorance, whether real or due to a temporary indisposition, may give a bad impression to any educated borrower, while both a lack or a superfluity of eagerness may be dangerous at times. While discussion of literary or professional topics in the hearing of members of the public may pass the assistants' time and impress the borrowers, it may also annoy them if they feel that it detracts from the assistants' attention to their conversation and demands for individual help. A new junior, left alone on the counter for even a few minutes at a time, may do incalculable harm by lack of discrimination in applying rules and fines, and in neglecting to refer difficult enquiries to senior assistants. Consider, for instance, that an enquiry which in one assistant's hands may eventually warrant the decision of the librarian and committee, and perhaps international borrowing, may in another's view be futile and an occasion for a bald statement of: "No, we haven't got the book!" and for the discomfited retreat of the disappointed borrower. In fact, the more specialized or learned the request, the less likelihood of its being satisfactorily answered, since no assistant is able to cope with all experts on their own ground. This lack of bibliographical knowledge which is widespread among library staffs and inevitable in new juniors, is almost universal on library counters where the newest junior so frequently trembles before borrowers who are so much older in years if not in mental development. An ignorance of the classification may (and sometimes does) lead all of us at one time or another to leave unexploited a worthy book and a worthier borrower.

But by far the most vital cause of inadequate service among assistants is the general dislike of counter duty since in our examination syllabus

we have made a fetish of technique and its servants—classification and cataloguing. Senior assistants disappear with an important air into the back of the building armed with a copy of Dewey or a stack of catalogue cards, the librarian rushes about muttering impressive phrases such as " my Committee," " Mr. Mayor," or, " the Library Association," thus producing in the assistants on the counter an entirely unjustified impression that they are missing the cream of the work—that delightful position of being able to sit down behind a desk with an extension telephone poised excitingly with potential demands from public departments and the outside world. This last problem is interconnected with the organization of libraries to which so much harm is due. As I have already hinted, the senior staff are often unavailable: usually by reason of more administrative and technical duties than they can reasonably execute. There is no other profession in which senior assistants are so much a law unto themselves as in our own, for very often by reason of our insufficiency of supervision they make their own jobs. The librarian is usually overwhelmed with committee work, administration, and supervision, so that he is rarely accessible in the same way that a bank manager is prepared to interview his most insignificant client. It is difficult to restrain the impression that the public is being fobbed off with a second-rate service.

The overworking of staff, a common feature of libraries, may result in a dangerous lethargy where an ability to make capital of the most diffident enquiry would be more desirable. There are, also, extremely dangerous periods just after a department is opened, and just before it is closed: in the one case the staff may be busy putting the finishing touches to clearing the counter, arranging the displays, etc., and in the other they may be engaged in issuing as many books as possible—in either case a query which might result in detailed search during the middle of the day may be summarily dealt with. Our method of shift periods may often allow of there being only a minimum staff during the slack hours of the day, or in the evening, and this is not at all desirable from the point of view of the public, since a small staff has its hands full with carrying out the routine work of the library.

The book stock is usually unrepresentative of the service available: from recent counts it has been ascertained that a third of the stock of a modern lending department is usually on loan, and, of course, this third includes not only the newest but many of the standard works for which the average borrower first looks. In addition, many books may be delayed on the workroom shelves owing to lack of staff to process them, or to the

number of processes through which they have to pass; books may be retained unduly from the shelves owing to "queries," binding, long reserve lists, long renewals, or loans through the Bureaux. Censorship may result in many a desirable book resting immaculate in the librarian's office, represented only by a catalogue entry distinguished with a mystifying symbol. The catalogues may lack suitable and comprehensible guides to their use, the classification may be faulty and remain unexplained to the public. The staff may be untrained for a variety of reasons, including the disinclination of the qualified seniors to help the juniors with their preparation for examinations, the distance of the library from other systems, and the inadequacy of the training offered and available having regard to the salaries of the junior staff.

The library may possess little or no co-operation between departments, and it may overload assistants with routine duties while on counter. It may not make sufficiently known the facilities of the library, such as renewals, reservations, Bureau work, etc. The mass methods of library correspondence to-day—printed overdues, duplicated letters, and so on—may result in indifferently or even rudely worded communications owing to neglect to revise the phrasing when such forms require renewal. Our borrowers' application forms are too frequently puzzling in their complexity: compare your own forms with the type of order form issued by the Phœnix Book Company, where Mr. John Baker's technique has produced a fool-proof system. Last of all, practically every library suffers from two definite set-backs: lack of trained staff and lack of sufficient books.

The rules of a library are often an unintentional drawback: they have usually been framed without imagination, and are too frequently enforced in a literal fashion. Hours of opening are so rigidly applied that the occasional borrower is inconsiderately turned away, when he may have very urgent reasons for wishing to borrow a book outside the usual hours. Defaulters are sometimes suspended for some small error, and good borrowers permanently lost. Children may be too severely restricted, notwithstanding the necessity for quiet in neighbouring departments. A severe limitation of the number of books borrowed is sometimes, and a heavy fine is definitely, a hardship. Guarantees for borrowers and age limits for children may be necessary under certain circumstances, but as certainly react unfavourably to the interests of an occasional would-be borrower. In fine, the rules are rarely sufficiently elastic to meet the fullest requirements of all but the most ordinary reader.

In a few paragraphs I have tried to give you the most usual reasons for our loss of so many borrowers. If there had ever existed a library which suffered from as many disadvantages as I have enumerated it would undoubtedly have closed its doors after a very short period, but fortunately such an atrocity has never had being. However, every library suffers from some of these defects, and the remedy lies largely in our own hands.

From the library committee's point of view it would be desirable to staff all public departments with trained assistants and to restrict juniors mainly to departments behind the scenes, in the same manner as a bank only allows experienced assistants to attend to its clients, while its juniors perch on high stools and deal with interminable ledgers. But whether this practice would be advisable or not, it is not practicable, for we have neither the large number of trained assistants already in the profession who could take over the duties of so many juniors nor are the ratepayers willing to pay the large increase in salaries which would be necessary, and therefore assistants must encompass their own salvation.

Difficulties of character can largely be remedied by each member of the staff himself: few assistants have not experienced that self-reproach when a borrower has not received his full share of attention, and the great factor is an everlasting *willingness* and a capacity, where necessary, to suffer fools gladly. Bibliographical knowledge can be acquired, and an insatiable curiosity and a determination to open books as well as to shelve them will stand any assistant in good stead. But by far the most important and desirable acquisition is a supreme tact which is capable of coping adequately with every borrower and every circumstance, no matter how unusual. Tact, again, is only acquired by patience and unrelenting perseverance, and none of us can possess it in too great quantity. Rules and organization, in what measure they may fall short of the ideal, are the province of the library committee and the librarian, and fortunately in the majority of cases difficulties of administration and regulations are being removed with a sympathetic spirit. Therefore you may well ask how it is that a library with a good staff and a sympathetic committee still has its faults to a much larger extent than is desirable. To this I would subscribe my own analysis of the situation, and if you are not inclined to agree with my suggestions, I would at least urge that the remedies mentioned previously are only secondary to some more fundamental remedy which must still be sought if we are to provide an improved service and keep our readers.

To this latter portion of the paper I almost feel that a separate title

might be given: The Gentle art of losing heart. So many assistants must have met older and rather uninteresting members of their profession and later have been told, to their great surprise, that they had been brilliant librarians years before. This process of deterioration is common enough almost to win acceptance from the youngest assistants, and lest we should be too ready to acquiesce in a like fact I would bring these factors to your consideration. Staffs are controlled by three exterior circumstances: conditions, opportunities, and salaries. Conditions are divisible into those in working hours and those in the assistant's leisure time. In working hours the assistant's happiness is dependent on the senior staff, in his leisure it is dependent on our own professional organizations. Most authorities insist that their assistants sit for professional examinations, and to the preparatory study for these much of the leisure time available must be devoted. As with the syllabuses of almost every other examining body, the subjects of our curriculum do not correspond entirely with the work which the assistant is doing, and a certain percentage of failures must be due to this fact. The whole examination question has been brought into the open recently, and is likely to remain there for some time to come, but it is undoubtedly essential for assistants to watch carefully the progress of the new syllabus at present under consideration, and to fight for a closer relation of syllabus to practical requirements, and especially for the payment of greater attention to the necessity for a larger representation in the syllabus of bibliography and world literature—subjects in which no assistant can ever be sufficiently schooled. Again, the Library Association should be pressed for a more detailed syllabus which would give more guidance to tutor and student, and both assistants and examiners should more frequently be reminded that the examinations were instituted to assist the evolution of good librarians, *not* to encourage cramming or to ensure failure.

Our own professional journal, THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT, is—I claim, without any reflections on its past or present editors—unrepresentative of our own interests. Too many copies seem to be destined for waste paper without the wrappers being broken, and for this, perhaps, its contents are most to blame. The majority of articles and regular features printed could just as easily be issued in one of the other professional periodicals. Even Mr. Halliday's notes on examinations would probably be acceptable to the *Library association record*, as a students' section. On the other hand, in common with many other assistants, I have always looked forward to new numbers of the ASSISTANT, and, moreover, feel it to be an essential part

of our professional life. Should there be any move to cease its publication in the forthcoming amalgamation of the A.A.L. and the L.A., we should be prepared immediately to continue to publish the ASSISTANT as an independent journal—even if only in the form of a duplicated pamphlet, on the lines of *The Week*—and thus avoid destruction of the solidarity of our Association. In the meantime, and partly in preparation for any such emergency, we should reform THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT and make its contents representative of the interests of its readers, and to this end the A.A.L. Council should set up a committee to ascertain those interests and to cater for them. This brings me to my final point: the junior assistant.

The junior assistant, besides being interested in the theory, routine, and administrative side of library work, in examinations and in various literary problems, is deeply interested in his own prospects and in the conditions under which he works. It is of small avail to encourage him to study seriously for his examinations if he is not reassured as to his future salary and ultimate position. I suggest the following items which should be covered in each number of the ASSISTANT:

(1) A critical survey of all library posts advertised nationally or seminationally in the previous month. This review would have to be under the direction of a committee, and it would be useful to indicate what jobs should be black-listed by any self-respecting assistant. I do not claim that such black-balling would be very effective at first, but after some years it would achieve a powerful influence which would help our own profession. In the meanwhile let us help to provide bad authorities with indifferent assistants.

(2) All cases of hardship and unwarranted treatment of assistants should be exposed. It would be absurd to say that this would have any immediate effect on the authorities concerned, but in time to come assistants would learn to avoid the service of authorities who were consistently indifferent to the working conditions of their staffs. Thus, many of us have heard of authorities who still have not restored the cuts they made in 1931—or, moreover, have increased them—and while N.A.L.G.O. takes general cognizance of this, the A.A.L. should expose cases in its own profession, for it is only fair that the unwary assistant should be warned by his immediate "Union."

(3) Appointments of the unqualified or the too-well qualified should be publicized. If assistants are to have pride in their profession we must help them to maintain their independence by the assurance that the A.A.L. definitely approves or disapproves of known cases.

Perhaps this smacks of communism, socialism, or mere trade unionism to our more respectable members—but that is beside the point, for even the true blues look after their own interests. Nor is it necessarily the duty of the L.A. to cover this matter, for assistants must look to themselves, and they have an opportunity for more open opinion than is wise in the official *L.A. record.*

Finally, assistants should become aware of their position in their own profession: that is, they should not necessarily vote against every motion of the Library Association, but they should at least make sure that they vote correctly, having consideration to their present and future interests. It will therefore be no surprise to you that I feel that the A.A.L. should be an independent Association of Assistants, and that I for one shall be sorry if we ever merge completely into a larger association and therefore lose our independence and our own strength.

From the foregoing you will have seen that I have not been at pains to hand to libraries the outworn bouquets for the "splendid work we have done, are doing, and are going to do." My sole purpose has been to point out that because we deal with large numbers of people we are losing sight of the fact that the interests of every one of them are entitled to sympathetic consideration. Moreover, I have endeavoured to show that the ultimate cause of our negligence is something inherent in the defective structure of our own profession—due, perhaps, to our national system of "muddling through"—and that it can be remedied if we can bring about a new attitude in assistants by means of our own Association and journal. Let us cope adequately with the apathy which appears widespread in libraries to-day.

"News from Outside"[1]

S. HOLLINGWORTH

MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES, AND GENTLEMEN,—I do not profess to be what is known as "a good public speaker." I have indeed a fundamental distrust of the type. When we hear a plausible, glib-tongued speaker, we north-country folk usually ask ourselves "What's he after?" and I want to assure you that, in that derogatory sense, I am not "after" anything. My main claims for a hearing to-night

[1] *An address to the Inaugural Meeting of the A.A.L. at Chaucer House on the 18th January.*

are, that I am representative, that I have strong feelings about the importance of the subject, and have a bias in favour of sincerity, even at the cost of loss of smartness and polished oratory.

I had hoped that the title would have explained itself, but lest there be any misgivings, let me hasten to assure you that the phrase "News from outside" does not refer in any way to prisons or asylums. Rather does it refer to news from a barbaric outside world of competitive stress, of pre-occupation with "getting and spending," of teeming waste and confusion, to a world whose inhabitants are custodians of culture, of sanity, and of peace. You will, I hope, forgive me if I seem to over-emphasize the differences between our two worlds. I know, of course, that as individual men and women you are inseparably bound up with this outside world, but functionally, that is you as librarians and myself as a borrower, there is a definite difference amounting almost to a cleavage in our two worlds IN THE MIND OF THE BORROWER.

May I develop this theme for a moment? You live, relatively, secure lives. For the greater part of my working life (and I speak for the vast majority of my fellows) I have never been sure of my livelihood from week to week. Insecurity is our background, but we do not grudge you your security, for we would not have the thing for which you stand based upon insecurity. Our days, spent in the counting-house, the warehouse, the factory, are competitive, rushed, preoccupied with the fleeting moment. Yours are rooted and grounded in the great eternal verities. I stress these things because it is this insecurity, this lack of serenity, this un-ease of mind which go to make up the environment of the public whom you serve, it is these things which condition your task as librarians; and so to-night I ask you to think of me as a graduate of this harsh outside world.

But I am also a graduate of a pleasanter, and a more mellow world: the world of book borrowers. Nor am I a dilettante borrower, a sender of children to the library for "a nice book for Daddy." For twenty-eight years I have incessantly, voraciously, and gladly borrowed books from libraries. Even now when I enter a library I experience a lifting of the spirit, an anticipatory glow, which is akin to that lightening of the heart, that remembrance of past delights, with which we greet a familiar friend. It is on this note that I propose to close this introductory phase and embark on my main theme.

Since I have been in this room to-night, confronted as I am by this

massed company of librarians, I have been haunted by the memory of a small boy. This boy is important to our purpose to-night. He is, in fact, your raw material. Let me tell you about him.

It is the year 1910 in a working-class district of Manchester. The boy is ten years old and he is about to join the Public Library. He has made other abortive attempts whilst he was under age, only to be exposed and banished into outer darkness; but now he goes forth with confidence, because he is equipped with documentary proof from his head master. At last he is going to enter this almost legendary world of Henty and Herbert Strang, of great fat volumes of the *Boy's own paper*. He is good, promising material from a not uncommon north-country background of Liberal-Radical Nonconformism, with a culture composed of Carlyle, Ruskin, Emerson, and the Epistles of Paul. Perhaps an old-fashioned environment nowadays, but I can think of worse. He has a predisposition in favour of books. He already owns and has absorbed into his system three books, *The Arabian nights* (translation unknown, but *not* Burton's), Porter's *Tales of the Scottish covenanters*, and *The Three musketeers*. He is greedy and ripe for more and so he enters the library and stands by the counter. As he looks beyond the wicket gate at the masses of books in this unexplored country, there comes to him a dim intimation of the beauty and riches of the kingdom he is about to enter; and so he stands, a little lost—until he is aroused from his dreaming by the voice of authority. It is the rather annoyed voice of a lady assistant as she repeats her " welcome to the library " formula. " Show me your hands " she insists. This is a new complication. His hands were clean enough when he left home, but during his journey here there have been incidents and encounters—the stone he had picked up, the stick he had satisfyingly rattled along some railings, the statement about wet paint which had proved to be true—just the usual hazards of travel. Therefore, though his hands had lost the anæmic wan-ness of extreme cleanliness and were, perhaps, honourably stained, yet they were not really dirty and so, humbly and yet hopefully, he raises his hands in that attitude, placatory and submissive, which has been the immemorial gesture of all subject peoples. The voice of authority, the voice of a tired, bored, and, perhaps, slightly bilious authority speaks. " Go home and wash your hands," it says, " and come back when they are clean."

I know that clean hands are important and that, being human, you become tired and irritable, but do, please, save your boredom and irritation for the thick-skinned and complacent adults to whom you peddle escapist dope.

This particular boy came back—I wonder how many boys never come back.

If I have seemed to stress this boy's experiences it is because his experiences and criticisms and suggestions are my news from outside. He had, in fact, very little criticism in his attitude to libraries. The library was a place in which he could obtain books; as for the librarians, they were his natural enemies, to be avoided if possible, and at other times to be endured as acts of God and other calamities.

There came a time when he had exhausted the meagre resources of the juvenile library (four shelves in the worst-lit corner). His soul longed for the wider pastures of the adult shelves. There was no strict line of demarcation between the two. If, in your simplicity, you asked for permission to enter this grown-up world, and thus by your eagerness betrayed your desire, "they" would, very naturally, refuse your request. You had to establish yourself by usage, a sort of "squatter's right." Get "them" used to you so that your presence in the adult section didn't surprise "them" into wondering how old you were, and you were established, subject always to "their" whim.

After a period of guerrilla warfare, the boy managed to establish a precarious footing among the real books. At this period of time certain high-lights stand out. The first adult book he had from the library was, by sheer luck, Wells's collection of short stories, *The Country of the blind.* It was like the opening of a door. Another high-light was the reading of that old slim collection of Fabian Essays. He remembers reading the first essay by someone called George Bernard Shaw during sermon time on Sunday night in the Methodist Chapel. He realized what poetry meant. Imagine meeting Swinburne for the first time at the age of seventeen. How he loved that dear, sonorous, sometimes meaningless, but altogether beautiful, verse. For all these things and many more he owes a deep debt of gratitude to libraries.

But there are criticisms. How much more he would have owed if his wild, plunging, chaotic reading had been guided by contact with the informed and cultured mind of the librarian.

I am reminded of a youth I talked with, who wanted to study psychology. For weeks he struggled through an out-of-date and unreliable pseudo text-book, which left him with a mass of ill-digested misinformation and a lasting loathing of the word psychology. The right book was probably next to the book he had chosen.

There are also criticisms of the general layout of the libraries of my youth. Are there still libraries where the unhappy borrower has to point to the book required from the wrong side of a glass partition, or else consult a hopelessly out-of-date catalogue?

Then there was the awful preponderance of late Victorian novelists. How I learned to hate that trio of, probably, quite estimable ladies, Mrs. Henry Wood, M. E. Braddon, and Edna Lyall.

Then, too, there was the architecture of the buildings with their unique flavouring of the sham Gothic and the workhouse styles. Their general atmosphere of the Public Assistance Board was intensified by the manner of the libraries, with their insistence on an unnatural quietness and a kind of hushed gloom, amidst which furtive borrowers stealthily crept from shelf to shelf.

These grousings are not of any present importance. They refer, I hope and believe, to a type of library that is rapidly becoming obsolete. For the past few years I have been a happy user of a Public Library at Dagenham which, I hope, is going to be typical of the new spirit in librarianship. There are no inaccessible shelves, no dark corners. For its size it is remarkably comprehensive and up to date. The additional library services are efficiently and pleasantly publicized. The children in the Junior Section seem to be at home and unconstrained. Most important of all, there is an air of friendliness in the place. The library staff seem to be actually pleased to see the borrowers. One meets friends there and discusses books, in fact the library is fulfilling its civic purpose as a centre from which culture and the humanities are disseminated into a somewhat arid industrial environment.

So much for that aspect of my news from outside. Before I begin the final phase of my address let me make a confession.

I had meant to paint a word-picture of the ideal library of the future, in the course of which I was to be witty and ironical, subtle and amusing. Since then, however, I have had, like the majority of you here to-night, a mental and spiritual shock. There has been a reassessment of values which has included ideas I have about the function of libraries and librarians, especially librarians. So I must forgo the wit and irony and, even at the risk of boring you, finish my address on a more serious note.

Shortly after I had begun to consider the subject-matter of this address, the September crisis came upon us. I remember vividly the night of Hitler's speech at Nuremberg. I had come home, tired and a little de-

pressed, for already the shadow of the crisis had begun to be more than a vague foreboding. The house was empty, for it was a birthday and my small family was celebrating by going to see " Snow White." After my evening meal I began to listen to the Nuremberg speech. As I heard the now familiar voice rushing on and on, I began to realize that whatever these unintelligible words meant to the waiting world there was about them no hint of peace. That harsh and angry voice meant war. Once again the jack-boot was trampling Europe. In common with most of you here, I had to face up to the fact that soon, and perhaps very soon, the even tenor of my way was going to be rudely upset. I will not trouble you here with my private problem, except to say that I had to make certain decisions, certain mental and spiritual readjustments in particular, which were disturbing and a little humiliating. It is not pleasant to realize that cherished beliefs are, when put to the test, sometimes merely rationalized opinions.

But one thing did become clear and firm in my mind, and it is relevant to our subject to-night. I realized the absolute necessity of the idea of democracy, of that way of living which embodies tolerance, and clear, unbiased thought as against wishful rationalizing. The need for preserving the idea of liberty of will. Now the very existence of this way of living is in jeopardy. English democracy has to resist not only the outward pressure of the various totalitarian countries, but also the inward stress generated by this resistance. In other words, we *may* have to become an armed camp, but at the heart of the camp there must be preserved a glowing core of belief in tolerance, in peace, and liberty of will.

Is this problem a contradiction in terms ? Then we shall have to become moral mathematicians, and in some way find a solution. We have hitherto comforted ourselves, when such fears have obtruded, by assuming that our educational system would solve this problem. We have assured ourselves that the new generation, product of the new educational system, would be better able to function as free citizens in a free state. It is more than likely that the reverse is true. Some of our leaders of education are becoming concerned about the growth of what they call " the servile mind," and the generation which has enthusiastically welcomed Hitler in Germany is the product of, perhaps, the finest educational system in the world.

And so those of us, and I am sure this includes all the members of your Association, who are concerned with this question must turn elsewhere. May I diffidently suggest that our Public Library system must become the bulwark of our defence against the threats to democracy ?

The Library Assistant

Seven million people belong to Public Libraries. For the majority of people, even in this age of cheap books, the only hope of any comprehensive contact with that power and beauty which we call literature is through the Public Library. People, ordinary folk, have a deep *need* of literature. If they are to develop an informed and critical ability to judge for themselves, if they are to have standards of belief and conduct which are not merely ephemeral and which are deeper rooted than the latest mouthings of propaganda coming from a loud-speaker, then they need the act of reading, the act of sharing with an artist his journey into life. They need information about the universe. If I may adapt the words of a great literary critic, the reader who is coming from the outside world into your library is coming from an environment, from a world, which says that the unavoidable lot of man is tedious and toilsome, and enslaved by necessity. He comes to you to receive an assurance that this is a lie of the enemy. That, in fact, the lot of the ordinary man can be extraordinary in its adventures and ecstasies, and its liberties of will. Such a man is building up for himself, *by means of the library*, a resistance to any attempt to steal from him or his fellows any part of this deeper and richer way of living.

The librarian, as the custodian of this way of living, becomes of the utmost importance. He must have for his profession a vocation, a calling. Also, assuming that you accept this idea of the function of the library in this latter age, then you must accept the tremendous responsibility placed upon the librarian. For in addition to following your calling as a vocation, you must take upon yourself an inner and most rigid discipline. There are special pitfalls which I should imagine will beset your way. You must guard against aloofness, against bookishness, against an amused and pitying condescension; above all, you must cultivate a humility of spirit.

Here is, in fact, the real, the authentic voice from outside. We from outside are living in a warped, confused, distorted, and distracting world. We will do what we can, but *you*—with your serene way of living amongst the constant daily impact of stored-up power and beauty—to you we say that because of your specialized knowledge, your special opportunities, and because of our really desperate and certainly most urgent need, help us, and in helping us be worthy of your vocation and justify your high calling.

Students' Problems: XVII

D. H. HALLIDAY

A FEW notes on the planning of studies may be helpful to those students who are embarking on their first correspondence course. One of the points in favour of an examination system is the self-discipline that the preparation demands. In studying by correspondence the need for this quality is doubled, and here many, if not most, students are found wanting. The dependency of school life is poor training for the task of planning and executing a lengthy programme of study. This, then, is the first and greatest difficulty. To realize it as such is a step towards overcoming it. Every possible effort must be made to bolster up that strength of purpose which will enable each lesson to be approached with as much enthusiasm and the same clearly arranged sequence as the first. A diary, entered for the month ahead, is a useful device. So many hours (or nights, or afternoons) per week should be booked in advance. Time should be allotted for each of the various stages—reading, making notes, and written work—the allowance for each depending, of course, on individual requirements based on experience. This should be a constant guide throughout the course, guarding against the too-human tendency to say "later"—meaning "never." If time is lost, readjust the schedule to compensate. Perhaps the following summary of the "routine" of correspondence study will be of help in mapping out such a programme.

Firstly, the tutor's notes sent out with each lesson have several purposes. On reading through for the first time, they will give some idea of the ground to be covered; then, on approaching the reading, they should serve as a guide to the arrangement of notes, as well as elucidating difficult points, generally directing and suggesting new trains of thought.

The reading itself is straightforward. The main aim should be to keep alert and never to lose sight of the fact that what is being discussed has a bearing on library work. Wherever possible, view it critically in the light of what happens in your own library.

If time permits, it is always better to make notes on a second reading of the prescribed sections of the text-books, rather than at first sight when all points are not fully grasped. In the May, 1938, number, Mr. Sharr gave some helpful advice on note-taking, so I shall say no more on that point, except to emphasize once again the need for using a loose-leaf method. Reading of successive books will provide new material which will have to

be added, and also fresh ideas are bound to occur later in the course and on reviewing marked papers. A certain time should always be spent consolidating notes and even rewriting them, with yet another recourse to the tutor's notes.

This preparatory work is the *real* work which matters most in correspondence study. It should be done gradually, allowing time for digestion. Little profit results from rushing ahead and trying to clear it off in the space of a few days.

As for written work, Mr. Sharr has again been helpful with suggestions (October, 1938, number). The essential point is to leave it until the full benefit of all the study and your observation in daily library work has accrued. And here is an important exercise in self-discipline. Try to refrain from looking at the questions when the lesson is first received. Otherwise the tendency is to make notes only with a view to answering the questions. Take the greatest care in considering the intent and scope of each question, deciding on the form the answer should take. Plan all answers that require essay form so that ideas are concisely treated in paragraphs and so that the intent of the question is always to the fore, gradually leading up to a clearly stated conclusion. Probably the worst fault of beginners (and others too) is to open the answer with general observations having little bearing on the question. This conventional opening of the old-fashioned essayists will not do for examination work. Train yourself to *get down to* the question in the first paragraph.

In general, the student is required to answer questions under examination conditions, i.e. without reference to text-books and allowing an average of thirty minutes per question. This enables the tutor to judge the standard of the month's work. That is an important principle of correspondence study, showing the ideal balance between the preparatory work and the written work. Students are inclined to bestow nearly all their care on the latter, regarding the answering of the questions as the sole end of each month's work, and thus debar themselves from much of the benefit of the teaching.

One final point. On receiving each set of marked papers, study the tutor's remarks with the greatest care, following up all suggestions, revising where necessary, and amending or adding to your notes.

Revision School.—An announcement about the proposed revision school appears in this number. While there has been an excellent response from provincial students, who are willing to travel long distances to London for

this meeting, London students themselves have remained apathetic. An earnest appeal is made to members of the Greater London Division to support this venture, which can—if backed with enthusiasm—mark a decided extension of our educational facilities.

More About the Classified Catalogue

S. McDONALD

MISS TAYLOR, in her article on the classified catalogue and its indexes (LIBRARY ASSISTANT for March), ignores the real difficulties which an examination student has to face. It must be remembered that in the examination, entries for both the dictionary and the classified catalogue are being made at the same time, and the feature which causes the greatest confusion is the transforming of the various subject references in the former into subject index entries in the latter. The author index is well understood. As Miss Taylor points out, the information in text-books is meagre. Mann is too delightfully simple. Sharp recognizes that there is a problem, but to my mind shirks the matter by making the subject index quite as complicated with references as the dictionary catalogue.

In her first example, Miss Taylor takes a book on lithography. For the dictionary catalogue a subject entry is made under the heading LITHOGRAPHY with a *see also* reference from ENGRAVING. In the classified catalogue the main entry is given in the classified sequence. An index entry is made: LITHOGRAPHY, 763, but what about the heading ENGRAVING? With Sharp's example in mind, the student needs to be told authoritatively that no index entry is required under this heading. Presuming that there are books already in the library on engraving, a reader looking up that heading in the index would find:

ENGRAVING . . . 760

It requires but a small amount of initiative to turn over the succeeding cards and find books on lithography at 763. In my opinion, readers should be left to make this slight effort.

Miss Taylor's treatment of the "*see*" references is sound and is an advance on Sharp.

There remains the question of rendering the subject index as far as possible relative. To take an example, Needlework in Dewey is at 646.2 and Embroidery is at 746. In the dictionary catalogue, books on these subjects

would be entered under their respective headings and connected with cross-references, e.g.

NEEDLEWORK, *see also* EMBROIDERY.

This should be dealt with in the index to the classified catalogue thus:

EMBROIDERY	746
NEEDLEWORK: EMBROIDERY . . .	746

Incidentally, Miss Taylor does students a disservice by giving entries in full. Very few libraries do this in practice and the examiners no longer require it. The author's name need not be repeated in the title, and added entries need only be represented by headings. Also, it might be said in conclusion that if a library can afford to analyse such books as Huxley's *Lay sermons*, as Miss Taylor says it should, it can well afford to give full indexes under all headings and to abolish references entirely.

Our Library

A report on the museums and art galleries of the British Isles (other than national museums), by S. F. Markham. Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, Dunfermline.

THIS report is designed as a natural successor to that one presented ten years ago by Sir Henry Miers. Its primary purpose is to show the trend and tendencies of the museum movement in this country during the years which have passed since Sir Henry's report appeared. That it should induce an immediate and urgent desire to begin works of development and improvement in the museum for whose advance the present writer is responsible, is surely to admit that at least in some instance it has achieved more than its primary purpose.

The state of the majority of our public museums, even after a decade of steady progress by the Museums Association, and of grants from the Carnegie Trustees, is shown to be deplorable. Curators, and not only librarian-curators, often neglect their obligations in a scandalous fashion. Buildings are dingy and difficult to locate. Display is so far removed from contemporary commercial notions on the subject as to suggest curators having been cloistered from the effects of the modern shop-window. Rate support is conspicuous by its absence, and council representation on museum committees is regarded as an indignity to be inflicted on only the youngest of councillors.

In face of all this depression, Mr. Markham is still able to raise an enthusiasm for the cause and find relief in the very few museums up and down the country which are in advance of their neighbours.

It is easy to label a museum as being bad. It has merely to correspond in actuality to the lay vision of a museum—dingy building, airless, and overflowing with the accumulated refuse of the centuries—to be thus labelled; but it is well to point out that this report freely admits that the conception of what is an ideal museum service hardly exists even as a vision, and much research is needed before even the Museums Association will be in a position to say with any degree of authority just what any particular museum should have in view when stating its policy.

The functions of a museum are stated precisely—it must collect and conserve objects of cultural importance, it must assist research workers and students, and it must educate and inspire—the latter function being based on a policy aimed at forming " the museum of ideas as contrasted with the museum of objects." Limited scope is urged as a basic collecting policy, and complete representation of local development is recommended as the correct aim for small town museums. One of the soundest suggestions in the report is that the C.U.K.T., acting with the Museums Association, should endeavour to define their conception of the ideal service for a representative provincial centre of about 50,000 inhabitants. Having done this, it is suggested they proceed to work out that ideal in a selected town.

It is surprising to learn that new museums are being opened at the rate of one in three weeks, many of them the result of indiscriminate enthusiasm and lacking any visible means of future support. Such efforts are roundly condemned—no doubt feelingly—for the present C.U.K.T. policy offers a marked contrast to that early enthusiasm of Carnegie himself which resulted in so many large and pseudo-Gothic library buildings being set up in towns which at no time were able to raise enough money to stock them with books. On the matter of finance, Mr. Markham goes boldly to his recommendations that Government grants are the logical solution to the difficulties of many museums. He glosses over the inhibiting fears which raise their dark heads amongst librarians when the question is discussed as it affects libraries, and has little fear of inspection being other than helpful. It is to be assumed that Mr. Markham is thus freed by his observation of the State's governance of the national galleries and museums.

The C.U.K.T.'s cautious distribution of grants-in-aid is condemned, in that it may be summarized as being a policy of " To him that hath shall be

given." The well-established and rate-supported museum qualifies for its grant, the establishment struggling along without a proper rate allocation has its application rejected simply because it *does* lack money and all that money can do. Such a museum is justified in retorting that this policy merely creates a vicious circle, for were the Trustees to make a grant, and so make reorganization possible, the smartened and, for the first time obviously useful, museum would make an immediate claim on the generosity of the local Finance Committee, and rank as being worthy of adequate rate support. A system of area curatorships is offered as a solution to this problem, though a more liberal direct grant policy seems to be a more obvious one.

The recent Act which limits the proportion of co-opted members to elected members on council committees is deplored, since Mr. Markham is by no means unaware of the ignominy attaching to " relegation " of any but the rawest of new members to service on a museums committee. He hopes for a change of attitude as the importance and value of museums grow, but frankly pins his faith on the sympathy and understanding of men co-opted because of their known ability and interest in the work.

A drastic lifting of the standard of administrative method and organization is urged, very few museums being deemed worth singling out as possessing good examples of attractive appearance, intelligent display, or forceful publicity. The several well-chosen plates serve to throw the old and the new into startling contrast, and the fact that " old " is really " out-of-date contemporary " is sufficient condemnation in itself. It is worth noting that the more advanced of our museums are not necessarily the most richly endowed.

It is refreshing to have an expert arguing in favour of popular display, even when such arrangement results in the hallowed hierarchies of natural order irreverently being upset for the benefit of the unlettered. Imagine a report on libraries in which Mr. Sayers maintained that, after all, logical classification of books was not the most useful order, since readers did not use books in that way. The approval in face of personal dislike given to the audacious treatment of costume display at Liverpool is a fine recommendation, did he need one, of Mr. Markham's qualities as a surveyor of our museums.

As a cultural and educational force in the country, museums are in their infancy. They labour under many limitations, and often, because their curators do not labour, they are limited. This report, if properly con-

sidered by curators, and properly sponsored by them when in contact with members of their committees, must remain as a source of shame and irritation until such of its recommendations and suggestions as are applicable have been effected in their own museums.

Correspondence

Reference Library,
Leeds, 1.
10*th March*, 1939.

The Editor,
The Library Assistant.

Sir,—

It was no easy task to endeavour to maintain the long and high traditions of The Library Assistant. It has been harder suddenly to abandon that task after three happy years of office. But, like Mr. Revie, I have had my own wishes overruled by the doctor's fiat. Indeed, that I have been able to carry on for so long is due entirely to the splendid help that I have received from others, and before relapsing completely into silence, I should like to give brief expression to my gratitude. Thanks are due to all my colleagues from time to time on the A.A.L. Council, but especially to Messrs. Revie, Coult, Hewitt, Martin, and Stevenson, and not least to my immediate predecessor and (ironically enough) acting successor, Mr. F. M. Gardner. To these names must be added those of the contributors of regular features, Messrs. Holliday, Collison, and Halliday, and Miss Carnell, and other contributors too numerous to name. I am grateful also to Mr. Cross, of Kingston-on-Thames, and Mr. Gordon, of Leeds, for essential facilities and encouragement freely given, to Miss K. J. Cockell and Miss L. A. Wray for valuable clerical assistance, and to the long-suffering staff of Messrs. Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., for kindly guidance in matters of printing. To all of these, among many others, both I and all readers of the journal are inestimably indebted.

Finally, I must record my deep appreciation of the honour done me by the members of the A.A.L. in entrusting me with the Editorship, and re-electing me unopposed year by year. I cannot adequately thank them for the opportunity thus given; I can only trust that my work has justified their confidence, and that my successor may build the better thereon,

fortified by the same encouragement I have myself received. That must be my valediction, Sir.

Sincerely,
T. I. M. Clulow.

The Editor,
The Library Assistant.

Dear Sir,—

We entirely agree with some of the points in the letter of Messrs. German and Harris, which appeared in the February number of The Library Assistant. As they mention in it, co-ordination among the various aspects of librarianship is needed and we are of the same opinion.

However, we cannot see why that, given the existence of the section of the A.A.L. to be called University Section, that that body would not be able to co-operate and co-ordinate as fully with the A.A.L. as the A.A.L. with the L.A. or the present divisions of the L.A. or A.A.L. with each other. To our way of thinking it would bring in just these people who are still outside the A.A.L. and even the L.A.

We admit, of course, that such a section would be small and that the task of forming would be no light one. The chief difficulty is to bring in those who are not even members of the L.A., for approach to them is likely to be slow. But in our opinion, to bring these people into the orbit of the L.A. such a section as has been suggested is the first thing necessary. Messrs. German and Harris would have it another way, and that is where we differ.

To recapitulate. We can seldom get to meetings of the A.A.L. during our term-time unless we are extremely fortunate, or unless it happens that the meeting takes place in the city or town in which we live. Nor can we get to the meetings of the Universities Section as a rule, for they are mostly held at great distances and are expensive as well. To have four meetings a year in such centres as Sheffield, Manchester, or Leeds on one day instead of a week-end as they now do would, in our opinion, lessen the cost in time and money, and yet give us that feeling as a body that we are taking part in the library world which at the moment we are not doing.

We sincerely hope that soon a small nucleus will come together to discuss the project, of which further particulars can be had of the undersigned.

T. G. Hutt, *Sheffield.*
H. Mason, *Hull.*

CENTRAL LIBRARY,
THE PARADE,
SUTTON COLDFIELD.
15th March, 1939.

TO THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

It may be worth while to draw attention to one point in Miss Taylor's article, "The Classified catalogue and its indexes," with a view to obtaining an authoritative ruling thereon. Miss Taylor's form of added entry for editors, translators, etc., gives the heading followed by the title and author in the form :

(1) Mathews, John, *ed.*
The preparation and mounting of microscopic objects, by Thomas Davies.

This form was adopted by me in preparing a correspondence course for the cataloguing examination, but was altered by the general editor of the course to the form :

(2) Mathews, John, *ed.*
Davies, Thomas. The preparation and mounting of microscopic objects.

In my opinion, reason clearly supports Example 1 ; but, I wonder, does the General Editor of the Cataloguing Course (if unchanged) still favour Example 2 ?

Yours faithfully, L. WHITE, *Borough Librarian.*

Council Notes

THE Council met at Chaucer House on 3rd March, 1939, with the President (A. Ll. Carver) in the Chair.

Reports were made on the progress of arrangements for the Section's Annual General Meeting and the Sessional Meeting at the Liverpool Conference. The resignation of Mr. T. I. M. Clulow from the post of Hon. Editor was formally reported, and accepted with great regret, coupled with expressions of deep appreciation of the service he has rendered to the Association. The Publications Committee had received replies from the Divisions, assenting, with one exception, to the proposal to publish a digest of Divisional News in THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT in place of separate reports. Formal business only occupied most of the Committees.

The Council then considered and approved the Draft Annual Report, and verbal reports by representatives on the L.A. Council and Committees concluded a shorter meeting than usual.

D. E. C.

The Library Assistant

The Annual General Meeting of the Section will be held at Dagenham, Essex, on Wednesday, 7th June, 1939, by kind invitation of His Worship the Mayor. The programme will include the Presidential Address, a visit to the works of the Ford Motor Company, and a paper by Mr. James Hammond, F.L.A. (Manchester).

Members will have an opportunity of visiting the Civic Centre, in which the meetings will be held, the Becontree Branch Library, the home bindery and the local museum at Valencia House. It is hoped to arrange free transport facilities for provincial members from the main London termini to Dagenham, and back again in the evening in time for them to catch suitable trains.

Full details, including times of trains, will be published with next month's issue.

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